



February 28, 2023

Members of the Minnesota State Legislature
Via Electronic Delivery

Re: Letter in Support of H.F. 1712 –

Members of the House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN), the coalition to end relationship abuse, writes in support of H.F. 1712 – a bill that offers support to our youth who are involved or at risk of being involved with the criminal legal system. We are a statewide coalition that consists of over 80 member programs working to end relationship abuse. Our member programs provide direct services and support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence in all 87 counties in Minnesota.

We discuss domestic violence as a cycle of abuse that affects every aspect of a victim/survivor's life, often failing to consider the traumatic impacts that violence has on youths' social and educational outcomes, as well as their risk for involvement within the criminal legal system. When children witness or are victims of relationship abuse, they become more susceptible to long term physical and/or mental health problems. During these difficult times, families want and need mental and physical healing through restorative services and programs – which is exactly what H.F. 1712 supports.

H.F. 1712 creates an opportunity for us as a state to address the disparities within the juvenile legal system. In 2017, the Minnesota Department of Education found that Black students were 8 times more likely than white students to be suspended, and Indigenous students were 10 times more likely than white students to be suspended. We know that there is a direct correlation between school suspensions and incarceration – and that there are gross racial and social inequalities when it comes to the juveniles and adults who populate our jails and prisons. We fail victim/survivors, youth, and communities when we decide to meet youth who display ‘problem behaviors’ with punitive and restrictive practices and policies instead of supports and programming.

H.F. 1712 offers important remedies for restoring youth, their families, and communities through community-based programming that provides counseling, mentorship and educational opportunities to prevent at-risk youth from becoming incarcerated. We urge you to support H.F. 1712.

Sincerely,

Guadalupe Lopez
Executive Director
Violence Free Minnesota